

From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods

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While the monastic communities of the Holy Land were famously cosmopolitan and multilingual in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, there can be no doubt that Greek was the dominant language of the ecclesiastical culture there from the fourth century until well into the eighth century and beyond. In fact, as Cyril Mango has written, “the most active centre of Greek culture in the 8th century lay in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem and the neighboring monasteries.”¹ But alongside of Greek, and in addition to the other languages brought from abroad by monks and pilgrims, the indigenous languages of Syria/Palestine also flourished in this monastic milieu. These were principally Aramaic and Arabic. After the eighth century, in these same monastic communities, Greek underwent a declension in currency as the preferred idiom of the ecclesiastical culture of Palestine, although it is probably an exaggeration to say without qualification, as Mango does, that “in the course of the 9th century the practice of Greek all but died out in Palestine and Syria.”² The fact is that Hellenism remained an important defining characteristic of the theological matrix from which the local Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking Christian community took its sense of socio-confessional identity in the eighth and ninth centuries and beyond.³ But even in the fifth and sixth centuries, the formative period of Palestinian ecclesiastical culture, albeit that Greek was the dominant language, it was far from being the only idiom of Christian culture in the Holy Land, even in the monastic establishment, which in those days, particularly in the century or so that elapsed between the council of Chalcedon in 451 and the council of Constantinople II

¹C. Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest,” in *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio*, ed. G. Cavallo et al., I (Spoleto, 1991), 149–50. See also R. P. Blake, “La littérature grecque en Palestine au VIII^e siècle,” *Le Muséon* 78 (1965), 367–80, who spoke of a “sudden awakening” (p. 369) at this time in Mar Sabas. Siméon Vailhé wrote that “the eighth and ninth centuries were the golden age of Sabaite literature,” in his article, “Les écrivains de Mar-Saba,” *EO* 2 (1898–99), 33.

²Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine,” 151.

³See A. Cameron, “The Eastern Provinces in the 7th Century A.D.: Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam,” in ‘ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ: *Quelques jalons pour un histoire de l’identité grecque, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989*, ed. S. Said (Leiden, 1991), 287–313.

in 553, was in the process of becoming the arbiter of orthodoxy not only in Jerusalem but in the empire.⁴

This study explores the fortunes of Aramaic and Arabic in the monastic communities of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. What one hopes to show is that these indigenous languages had an important role to play in the promotion generally of the spiritual power and authority of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, the “mother of all the churches,” as Cyril of Scythopolis loved to call it.⁵ The inquiry unfolds in three steps: a discussion of language and theology in the monasteries in the crucial period of the Christological controversies of the sixth century; the monastic cultivation of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, largely for the purpose of meeting the pastoral needs of the indigenous Christians to whom the monks often ministered; and the turn to Arabic in the eighth century as the Melkite church consolidated its identity in the world of Islam. A brief appendix discusses the importance of Armenian and Georgian in the monasteries of Palestine in the period under discussion.

I. LANGUAGE AND ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

Almost from the beginning Judean desert monasticism drew a multilingual clientele from several parts of the empire. Of the seven notable monks whose stories Cyril of Scythopolis tells in his *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, not one of them was a native Palestinian; all had come to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, and all had stayed on to become founders or members of one or another of the monastic communities. The story was the same with other notable monks of the desert, such as Chariton, the father of Judean desert monasticism,⁶ Gerasimus,⁷ George of Choziba,⁸ and even John Moschus.⁹ The desert monasteries were closely tied to the *loca sancta* and pilgrimage to the Holy City; pilgrims came from all over the empire.¹⁰ Typical of what the hagiographers would say of the advent of one of their subjects to monastic life in the desert is what Cyril of Scythopolis said of Euthymius (377–473): “Led by the Holy Spirit, [Euthymius] came to Jerusalem in the twenty-ninth year of his life. After he had venerated the holy Cross, the church

⁴See the important study of L. Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche: Dal concilio de Efeso (431) al secondo concilio di Costantinopoli (553)*, Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose 18 (Brescia, 1980).

⁵See, e.g., the phrase as it appears in Cyril's presentation of Sabas' letter to Emperor Anastasius in E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1939), I, 155. Cyril, and Sabas, presumably borrowed this phrase from Jerusalem's liturgy of St. James. See R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 171.

⁶See G. Garitte, “La Vie prémetaphrastique de s. Chariton,” *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome* 21 (1941), 5–46; L. Di Segni, “The Life of Chariton,” in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. V. L. Wimbush (Minneapolis, 1990), 393–421; L. Campagnano Di Segni, *Cercare Dio nel deserto: Vita di Caritone* (Magnano, 1990).

⁷See H. Grégoire, “La Vie anonyme de s. Gérasime,” *BZ* 13 (1904), 119–35; L. Campagnano Di Segni, *Nel deserto accanto ai fratelli: Vite di Gerasimo e di Georgio di Choziba* (Magnano, 1991).

⁸See C. House, “Vita sancti Georgii Chozibita auctore Antonio Chozibita,” *AB* 7 (1888), 95–144, 336–59; T. Vivian and A. N. Athanassakis, *The Life of Saint George of Choziba and the Miracles of the Most Holy Mother of God at Choziba by Anthony of Choziba* (San Francisco-London, 1994).

⁹See the text of the *Pratum Spirituale* in PG 87, cols. 2851–3112. See also *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschus*, trans. J. Wortley, *Cistercian Studies* 139 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1992).

¹⁰See J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977); E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimages in the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 312–460* (Oxford, 1982).

of the holy Resurrection and the other venerable places, and also visited the inspired fathers in the desert, . . . he came to the *laura* of Pharan.”¹¹ Future monks of whom Cyril speaks came in this way from Cappadocia, Armenia, Syria, Greece, Byzantium, Bithynia, Galatia, Ethiopia, and Arabia, as well as from Jericho, Bethlehem, Scythopolis, Hebron, and Jerusalem itself.

In the monasteries the language of worship and theology was generally Greek, but there is ample evidence that when there were monks from another particular language community in a sufficient number to make it practicable, services in their own language could be arranged. So it was that in Theodosius’ monastery, for example, worship could be conducted in Armenian, Greek, and Bessian, according to Theodosius’ biographer, Theodore of Petra.¹² And Cyril of Scythopolis himself tells of the Armenians in Sabas’ monastery that Sabas told them “to perform the office of psalmody in Armenian in the little oratory on Saturdays and Sundays.”¹³ Subsequently, when Sabas had completed the construction of the new church in the Great Laura, he moved the Armenians. Cyril describes Sabas’ move as follows:

He then transferred the Armenians from the little oratory to performing the office of psalmody in the Armenian language in the church built by God, telling them to recite the Gospel and the rest of the sequence in the office on their own in Armenian and then join the Greek-speakers at the time of the holy sacrifice in order to partake of the divine mysteries. But when some of them tried to recite the Trishagion hymn with the addition “who was crucified for us” concocted by Peter nicknamed the Fuller, the godly man was rightly indignant and ordered them to chant this hymn in Greek according to the ancient tradition of the catholic Church and not according to the innovation of the said Peter, who had shared the opinions of Eutyches.¹⁴

What is clear from this passage is the acceptability of languages other than Greek in the Judean desert monasteries, even in portions of the divine liturgy. Equally clear, however, is the dominant and theologically determining role of Greek, especially in support of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In particular, Cyril makes it clear that Sabas was concerned about the subtle influence of Monophysitism in the liturgy in the form of the expanded liturgical formula of the Trishagion as it was chanted in Armenian. The Armenian practice mirrored that of the Jacobite liturgy in Syriac. Although Peter the Fuller’s (d. 488) addition to the Trishagion must have originally been in Greek (ο σταυρωθεὶς δι' ἡμᾶς), in the Syriac-speaking communities there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the addition to the formula in that language was for a time common to both Jacobites and Chalcedonians.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as the Christological controversies developed in the fifth, sixth, and

¹¹ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, I, 14. The English translation is that of R. M. Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis: The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cistercian Studies 114 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1991), 9.

¹² See Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 211 n. 25. Cf. H. Usener, *Der heilige Theodosius* (Leipzig, 1890; repr. Hildesheim, 1975), 45.

¹³ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, I, 105; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 114.

¹⁴ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, I, 117–18; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 126–27.

¹⁵ It is clear in the Syriac texts emanating from the theological controversies of the 7th century that Monothelete Chalcedonians, along with the Jacobites in the Syriac-speaking milieu, used the addition to the Trishagion. See S. Brock, “A Syriac Fragment on the Sixth Council,” *OC* 57 (1973), 63–71; and idem, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor,” *AB* 91 (1973), 299–346, both reprinted in S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984). See also S. Brock, “A Monothelete Florilegium in Syriac,” in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert Van Roey*, ed. C. Laga et al., *Orientalia Lovaniensia*

seventh centuries, the formula of the Trishagion used in the liturgy came more and more to signify ecclesiastical allegiance: Monophysites used the addition; Chalcedonians did not.¹⁶ So in the Great Laura in the year 501, the year when Sabas transferred the Armenians to the “church built by God,”¹⁷ and “some of them tried to recite the Trishagion hymn with the addition ‘who was crucified for us,’” Sabas immediately suspected the irruption of Monophysitism in his monastery. It was at a time in the reign of Emperor Anastasius I (491–518) when Monophysitism was in the ascendancy in imperial circles and the battle was on for the allegiance of the monks, not least in the Holy Land. Sabas, of course, following the lead of his master Euthymius, was staunchly Chalcedonian. He was in fact to become the champion of the Chalcedonian cause, not just in Jerusalem, but even in the courts of Anastasius I and of Justinian I (527–565) in Constantinople, in 511/512 and 531 respectively.¹⁸

Sabas’ insistence that the monks sing the Trishagion in Greek due to the fear that the Monophysite formula might otherwise be sung unnoticed in Armenian reminds the reader of Cyril of Scythopolis’ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* of the role that languages such as Armenian and Syriac, not to mention Coptic, played in the Christological controversies of the sixth and following centuries. It certainly came about in later times, after Constantinople II in 553, and particularly after Constantinople III in 680/681, that Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian increasingly were the languages most often used by Jacobites. But it is important to emphasize the fact that in the first two decades of the sixth century in Syria/Palestine the Christological controversies as they engaged Sabas and the monks of the Judean desert and elsewhere were largely conducted in Greek on all sides. To make this point one has only to mention the names of the principal Monophysite figures of the day, men such as Severus of Antioch (ca. 465–538, patriarch in 512–518), John Rufus (fl. ca. 515), Zacharias Rhetor (d. after 536), Julian of Halicarnassus (d. ca. 527), and the author of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*. While they all wrote works now preserved almost entirely in Syriac, it is nevertheless also true that they all wrote them originally in Greek.¹⁹ Even the Syriac writers of the period, men such as Jacob of Sarug (ca. 451–521) or Philoxenus of Mabbog (Hierapolis) (ca. 440–523), who wrote only in Syriac, were well aware that they were participating in an argument being conducted largely in Greek.²⁰ Cyril of Scythopolis mentions Philoxenus twice as one “who had been signal in anathematizing the dogmatic decree of Chalcedon and embracing Eutyches and Dioscorus and their heresy,”²¹ without any indication that he was a Syriac-speaker who wrote

sia Analecta 18 (Louvain, 1985), 35–45; and idem, “Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists,” OLP 17 (1986), 119–40, both reprinted in S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (London, 1992).

¹⁶See V. S. Janeras, “Les byzantins et le trishagion christologique,” in *Miscellanea Liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il cardinale Giacomo Lercaro*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1967), II, 469–99.

¹⁷On the churches in the Great Laura, see J. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries*, DOS 32 (Washington, D.C., 1995), 69–76.

¹⁸See the discussion in Patrich, *Sabas*, 311–19.

¹⁹For the details regarding the works and careers of these Monophysite thinkers, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972).

²⁰See A. De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog, sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain, 1963); R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford, 1977).

²¹See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 141, see also 148; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 151.

not a word in Greek. Therefore, the fact that Greek was the language of theology and of liturgical worship in the monasteries of the Judean desert does not of itself explain how it came about that the monastic establishment there became the leading proponent of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the sixth and succeeding centuries. As a matter of fact, until the day in the year 456 when Empress Eudocia was reconciled with Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem (422–458) due to the influence of Euthymius, and again in 482, according to Cyril, when a large number of *Aposchist* monks, as he called the Monophysites, were reconciled with Patriarch Martyrius (478–486), almost the whole monastic establishment in Palestine had been Monophysite sympathizers. It took from then until well into the sixth century to secure their full allegiance to the teaching of Chalcedon. The event that most evidently symbolizes the firm Chalcedonian allegiance of the monks of the Judean desert is the occasion in the year 516 when the archimandrites Sabas and Theodosius flanked Patriarch John III (516–524) in the pulpit of St. Stephen's Basilica in Jerusalem and the three of them, supported by a mass demonstration of ten thousand monks, according to the hagiographer, formally repudiated the wishes of Emperor Anastasius by anathematizing anyone who would not accept the teaching of the council of Chalcedon.²²

Once loyalty to Chalcedon was firmly established in the patriarchate of Jerusalem in the sixth century, due in large part to the insistence of the monastic establishment under the leadership of Sabas and the Sabaïte communities, and when the emperors Justin I (518–527) and Justinian I (527–565) made Chalcedonian orthodoxy the religious ideology of the empire, efforts were made, particularly in the Syriac-speaking areas of the patriarchate of Antioch, to institute a separate Monophysite hierarchy alongside the official Chalcedonian one. The role of Jacob Baradaeus (ca. 500–578) in this enterprise is well known, and it is after his name that the followers of the new hierarchs came to be called Jacobites.²³

It is true, as John Binns has recently written, that “when the ordinations of Monophysite bishops and clergy began in the 540s, Palestine was unaffected.”²⁴ He goes on to suggest that this was due in part to the internationalism of the monastic establishment in Jerusalem and in particular to what he perceives to have been a “steady decline in the use of Syriac in the church in Palestine” in the period after Chalcedon.²⁵ So convinced is he that what he calls “Syriac” had disappeared in Jerusalem, and that the monks spoke only Greek, with some occasional Armenian or Bessian, that he views as exceptional Cyril of Scythopolis’ report about the monk Gabrielius that “being highly intelligent and also studious, he had learnt to speak and write accurately in Latin, Greek, and Syriac.”²⁶ Gabrielius’ accomplishments certainly were exceptional, but this fact says nothing about the currency of a language called “Syriac” in Palestine in the sixth century. Nevertheless, Binns says that “by the start of the sixth century, Sabas and Theodosius were making no provision for Syriac-speakers in the liturgical practice in their monasteries,”²⁷ and he

²²See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 148–52.

²³The best discussion of this phenomenon remains E. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VIe siècle* (Louvain, 1951). See also Freud, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, esp. 255–95.

²⁴J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314–631* (Oxford, 1994), 190.

²⁵Ibid., 194–95.

²⁶Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 56; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 53.

²⁷Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors*, 195.

even supposes that there were no Syriac-speakers in the Judean monastic communities at all in later centuries. To support this view he cites the provision in the later *Typicon of Mar Sabas* to the effect that no “Syrian” should be allowed to be the superior in the Sabaite monasteries. But this very document, a product of the ninth century or later, in fact proves the opposite. One may cite two of its provisions to make the point. In the first place, the *Typicon* makes the same arrangement for “Syriac-speakers” as had earlier been made for Armenians and Bessans. The text says:

The Iberians or the Syrians [or the Franks] shall not be permitted to conduct a complete prayer service in their churches, rather, they will gather to chant the liturgical hours and the daily canon and will read the (Epistles) of the Apostle and the Gospels in their own language, and afterwards they will come into the great church and participate in the pure, lifegiving Divine mysteries together with the entire brotherhood.²⁸

Second, the very passage to which Binns refers, about no Syrian superiors, bespeaks their considerable presence. The text says:

And since the destructive demons, on occasion of the appointment of the monastery leaders, are wont to cause dissensions and quarrels between the two nationalities, that is, the Greek-speakers and the Syriac-speakers, in order to remove this stumbling block, we establish that from now on none of the Syrians will be appointed to the post of abbot, whereas for stewards, hostlers, and the other jobs we order and agree that Syrians shall be given preference, because in their lands of origin people are more efficient and practical.²⁹

The fact is, as Binns seems to be unaware, that there were those whom people called “Syriac-speaking” Chalcedonians in Palestine and elsewhere from the fifth century until well into later centuries,³⁰ when gradually, after the rise of Islam, both Greek and “Syriac” were eclipsed as day-to-day ecclesiastical languages by Arabic. Prior to the beginning of the ninth century there is every reason to believe that many of the “Syriac-speakers” in Palestine, especially those in the monastic communities, were bilingual, commanding both Greek and what many have come to call “Syriac.” This circumstance might well explain why in the sixth century there were no special provisions for them in the liturgy on the order of those made for the Armenians and the Bessans. When similar provisions did appear later in the *Typicon of Mar Sabas*, after the ninth century, it was because by then Greek itself was fast becoming more or less just a liturgical language in much of the Melkite community, and not least in the monasteries of Palestine.³¹

II. CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN ARAMAIC

Evidence for what the Greek texts call ἡ τῶν Σύρων φωνή in Palestine from the fourth century onward is abundant, and it is not confined, as Binns supposes, to the two in-

²⁸ Patrich, *Sabas*, 274. The translation is by Leah Di Segni on the basis of the text provided in E. Kurtz' review of A. Dmitrijevskij, *Die Klosterregeln des hl. Sabas* (Kiev, 1890), in *BZ* 3 (1894), 167–70.

²⁹ Patrich, *Sabas*, 275.

³⁰ See, e.g., the texts cited in note 15 above.

³¹ On this topic see S. H. Griffith, “Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the 9th Century: The Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*,” *Byzantion* 56 (1986), 117–38; and idem, “The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic,” *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), 1–28, both reprinted in S. H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (London, 1992).

stances cited by A. H. M. Jones in his influential article of 1959, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?”³² Jones had mentioned passages in Eusebius’ *Martyrs of Palestine* and in Mark the Deacon’s *Vita Porphyrii* that could serve as evidence for what he called “Syriac-speaking” townsfolk in Scythopolis and Gaza respectively in the early fourth century.³³ In response, Binns cites a passage from the travel diary of Egeria (ca. 384), which, he argues, is evidence of a steady decline in the use of Syriac in the church in Palestine beginning already in the late fourth century. It is worth quoting the passage from Egeria in full because it can be seen more as evidence of what would become a common pattern in Palestine rather than as evidence of the decline of the so-called Syriac language. She said, about her visit to the Anastasis in Jerusalem:

In this province there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac (*siriste*), but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but he never uses it. He always speaks in Greek, and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly, the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people understand. Of course there are also people here who speak neither Greek nor Syriac, but Latin. But there is no need for them to be discouraged, since some of the brothers or sisters who speak Latin as well as Greek will explain things to them. And what I admire and value most is that all the hymns and antiphons and readings they have, and all the prayers the bishop says, are always relevant to the day which is being observed and to the place in which they are used. They never fail to be appropriate.³⁴

The most straightforward construction to put upon the information contained in this passage, which clearly envisions a pilgrimage context, is that in the environs of Jerusalem people in the late fourth century generally spoke either Greek or what Egeria calls “Syriac,” or both, but Greek predominated in official circles and at the liturgy.

What Egeria called “Syriac” and what Eusebius and Mark the Deacon called “the language of the Syrians” is undoubtedly the language that even some modern writers still call “Palestinian Syriac,” although there is a fast developing consensus among current scholars to call it simply “Christian Palestinian Aramaic” (CPA), albeit that one recent writer proposes to call it “Melkite Aramaic.”³⁵ It was the Aramaic language of the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land, written in a script closely related to the *Estrangelo* writing of Syriac properly so-called, the Aramaic dialect that flourished in the vast territories of the patriarchate of Antioch stretching from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean eastward along the silk routes as far as China.³⁶

³²A. H. M. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?” *JTS* 10 (1959), 280–98, esp. 290–92.

³³Eusebius said that the future martyr Procopius (d. 303) in Scythopolis was a reader of the scriptures, a translator into “Syriac,” and an exorcist. See G. Garitte, “Version géorgienne de la passion de s. Procope par Eusèbe,” *Le Muséon* 66 (1953), 255. Mark the Deacon said that a local woman in Gaza told Porphyrius that her people had never learned Greek and knew only Syriac. See H. Grégoire and M. A. Kugener, *Marc le diacre, Vie de Porphyre évêque de Gaza* (Paris, 1930), 52–55.

³⁴J. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem-Warminster, 1981), 146.

³⁵See A. Desreumaux, “La naissance d’une nouvelle écriture araméenne à l’époque byzantine,” *Semitica* 37 (1987), 107.

³⁶For a popular account of the spread of Syriac-speaking Christianity eastwards, see S. H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, I: Beginnings to 1500* (San Francisco, 1992).

The earliest piece of actual Christian Palestinian Aramaic writing so far to come to light is an inscription in a mosaic pavement, discovered in a church in ‘Evron, north of Acre, which has been dated to A.D. 415.³⁷ In addition to inscriptions, a considerable archive of manuscripts in this language is known, particularly from the sixth to the eighth centuries, but including a number of texts from as late as the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.³⁸ The majority of the surviving manuscripts contain translations of portions of the Old and New Testaments, as well as translations of saints’ lives, and patristic and liturgical texts. On the basis of the distribution of the inscriptions, one recent scholar judges that the CPA-speaking population was distributed mainly in the area of Jerusalem, the Judean desert, Transjordan, and western Galilee.³⁹ Presumably these people were for the most part the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land; many of them may also have been Greek-speaking.⁴⁰ That they were to be found in the monastic communities of the desert as well is clear from the fact that so-called Palestinian Syriac inscriptions have been found, among other locations, in the Sabaite laura of Firminus, a foundation of the early sixth century (A.D. 515),⁴¹ and manuscript fragments have been recovered from the ruins of Castellion, Khirbet al-Mird, another Sabaite establishment of the year 492,⁴² as well as in the monastery of al-Quwaysmah, not far from Amman in Jordan.⁴³

There are a number of theories about the origins of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and its script. Here is not the place to go into them in detail. Suffice it first of all to say that it is a distinctive language in its own right, belonging to the group of West Aramaic languages that includes Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Galilean Aramaic, and Samaritan Aramaic. While it shares many features with Syriac, most notably its script, one must emphasize that it is a different language, as recent detailed grammatical and syntactical studies have clearly shown.⁴⁴ It flourished as a spoken language at least from the fourth

³⁷ See A. Jacques, “A Palestinian Syriac Inscription in the Mosaic Pavement at Evron,” *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1986), 54–56. See also V. Tzaferis, “The Greek Inscriptions from the Early Christian Church at Evron,” *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1986), 36–51.

³⁸ See J. Barclay, “Melkite Orthodox Syro-Byzantine Manuscripts in Syriac and Palestinian Aramaic,” *Lib.ann* 21 (1971), 205–19; M. Bar-Asher, “Palestinian Syriac Studies: Source Texts, Traditions, and Grammatical Problems in Palestinian Syriac” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976, in Hebrew); C. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des christlich-palästinisch-Aramäischen*, pt. 1, *Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik* 6 (Hildesheim, 1991), 9–26. See also K. Beyer, “Die Aussprache des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch: Zur neuen Grammatik von Christa Müller-Kessler,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40 (1995), 241–57.

³⁹ See M. Levy-Rubin, “Society, Language, and Culture in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem during the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic Period: Leadership versus Community,” paper presented at the Fourth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam, “Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East,” London, the Wellcome Trust, 5–7 May 1994, forthcoming. See also eadem, “The Patriarchate of Jerusalem after the Arab Conquest” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994, in Hebrew), 268–90.

⁴⁰ In the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus there is a story of one of several “Saracen” raiders who spoke to Abba Jordanes in Greek (Ἐλληνιστὶ). See PG 87, chap. 155, col. 3024B; Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 129.

⁴¹ See A. Desreumaux et al., “Chronique archéologique: Le laure de Saint Firmin,” *RevBibl* 75 (1978), 417–19; J. Patrich and R. Rubin, “Les grottes de el-‘Aleliyat et la laure de saint Firmin,” *RevBibl* 91 (1984), 381–87. See also Patrich, *Sabas*, 117–18.

⁴² See C. Perrot, “Un fragment christo-palestinien découvert à Khirbet Mird,” *RevBibl* 70 (1963), 506–55; J.-T. Milik, “The Monastery of Kastellion,” *Biblica* 42 (1961), 21–27; M. Baillet, “Un livret magique en christo-palestinien à l’Université de Louvain,” *Le Muséon* 76 (1963), 375–401. See also Patrich, *Sabas*, 144–45.

⁴³ See E. Puech, “L’inscription christo-palestinienne du monastère d’el-Quweisme,” *Lib.ann* 34 (1984), 341–46.

⁴⁴ See M. Bar-Asher, “Le syro-palestinien: Études grammaticales,” *JA* 276 (1988), 27–59; C. Müller-Kessler, “Die Überlieferungsstufen des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch,” in *XXIV. deutscher Orientalistentag, vom 26.*

through the eighth centuries, with a distinctive, if borrowed, script of its own at least from the fifth century onward. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the period from which the latest texts come, it had become merely a liturgical language, which, to judge by the prescriptions allowing liturgical lessons in “Syriac” in the *Typicon of Mar Sabas*, nevertheless still had its place in Palestinian monastic life.

The largest majority of the 110 CPA manuscripts known to have survived to modern times, eighty-three of them, come from the period between the sixth and eighth centuries,⁴⁵ the period during which the language flourished in everyday speech. And although it was the language largely of the rural population outside the major cities of Palestine, and of the non-Greek-speakers in the urban areas, the manuscripts have been preserved in monastic collections, largely the library of St. Catherine’s monastery in Sinai, the repository of many of the manuscripts written originally in the monasteries of the Judean desert in Greek, CPA, Syriac, and Arabic. Most of the CPA manuscripts survive only partially, and many of them are palimpsests, testifying to the eclipse of the spoken language from the ninth century onward. Due to the fragmentary state of the remains, and the scarcity of colophons, it is difficult to know exactly where the texts were actually written and copied in the first place. It is not unreasonable to suppose, as most scholars do, that they were products of the Judean desert monastic communities. They are almost all translations from Greek originals; there seem to be no original CPA compositions among them. All of them are Chalcedonian in their theological persuasion. Presumably they would have served the needs not only of CPA-speaking monks, but of those local persons with whom the monks were in a daily pastoral relationship.⁴⁶ Indeed, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that Syriac-speaking monks were the ones who adapted the *Estrangelo* script of Syriac to the requirements of CPA.⁴⁷

One knows that there were Syriac-speaking monks in the desert monastic communities. There is the example of the trilingual monk Gabrielius mentioned above. Cyril of Scythopolis says that Gabrielius, and his three brothers who came to Euthymius’ monastery, were “of Cappadocian origin and Syrian rearing.”⁴⁸ The five pioneering monks at the site that would become the monastery of Choziba were all Syrians, as Anthony of Choziba testifies.⁴⁹ There are some Syriac inscriptions in Palestinian monastic environs.⁵⁰

bis. 30 September 1988 in Köln: ausgewählte Vorträge, ed. W. Diem and A. Falaturi, *ZDMG*, suppl. 8 (Stuttgart, 1990), 55–60.

⁴⁵ See Bar-Asher, “Le syro-palestinien,” 33.

⁴⁶ In the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus there is the story of a “Saracen” woman, who was a Christian, whose destitution drove her to offer herself unclothed to Abba Sisinios. The text says he spoke to her “in Hebrew (Ἐβραϊστί).” See PG 87, col. 2999B; Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 112. Some translators have simply rendered the term as “Syriac.” See, e.g., M.-J. Rouet de Journal, *Jean Moschus, Le pré spirituel*, SC 12 (Paris, 1946), 187. It seems probable that John Moschus knew that the local Christians spoke a language closely related to that of the local Jews (Jewish Palestinian Aramaic) and that Abba Sisinios actually spoke to the woman in Christian Palestinian Aramaic.

⁴⁷ See Desreumaux, “La naissance d’une nouvelle écriture,” 106.

⁴⁸ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 25; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 21.

⁴⁹ See House, “Vita sancti Georgii Chozibitae”; idem, “Miracula beatae virginis Mariae in Choziba,” *AB* 7 (1888), 360–70; idem, “Nota in Vitam sancti Georgii Chozibitae,” *AB* 8 (1889), 209–10. An English translation of these texts is in Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Life of Saint George of Choziba*.

⁵⁰ See S. Brock, “Syriac Inscriptions: A Preliminary Check List of European Publications,” *Journal of the Syriac Academy* 4 (1978), 290–312, also published in *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 38 (1978), 255–71, and reprinted in Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*.

There were Syriac manuscripts in the monastic libraries.⁵¹ And during the controversies with the Monophysites, parties in Palestine did not hesitate to make contact with monks in Syria. In this connection, one might mention an incident that Cyril of Scythopolis records, according to which Empress Eudocia sent a message to no less a personage in Syria than Simeon Stylites to advise her on her doctrinal allegiance; he told her to follow the teaching and guidance of Euthymius.⁵² In the late eighth century, two monks of Mar Sabas monastery, Patricius and Abramius by name, translated the ascetical homilies of Isaac the Syrian, also known as Isaac of Nineveh (fl. after 650), from Syriac into Greek.⁵³ In the ninth century, Theodore Abū Qurrah, one of the earliest monks of Mar Sabas regularly wrote in Arabic, also, on his own testimony, wrote some thirty tracts against the Jacobites in Syriac.⁵⁴ Yet it remains true that Syriac properly so-called did have a low profile in the monasteries of the desert of Judah in the fifth and sixth centuries, to judge by the scarcity of the written remains of it that have come down to us. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Christological controversies of that time, during which Syriac came to be the de facto language of most Jacobites and Nestorians, had something to do with its small showing in the monasteries of Palestine.⁵⁵ But there was an ample presence of Christian Palestinian Aramaic there. Although it was a different dialect of Aramaic than was Syriac, its currency in the monastic milieu may well have sufficed for the speakers of Aramaic.

The recognition of the currency of CPA in the Judean desert monastic communities from the fifth through the eighth centuries will also go a long way toward explaining how the monks communicated with the numerous local people with whom they were involved. Not least among them were those whom Cyril of Scythopolis mentions more than fifteen times under the name οἱ Σαρακηνοί, or “the wolves of Arabia,”⁵⁶ as he also calls them in one place. He sometimes uses the term ὁ βάρβαρος interchangeably with the term ὁ Σαρακηνός.⁵⁷ When, as a result of the ministry of the monks, in particular “the miracle-working Euthymius,” some Saracens became Christians, Cyril says of them that they are “no longer Hagarenes and Ishmaelites, but now descendants of Sarah and heirs of the promise.”⁵⁸ It is clear from Cyril’s accounts that the monks were in regular contact with both “Saracens” and other Palestinians who would have known very little if any

⁵¹ For example, the lower two layers of a quintuple palimpsest found at Sinai contain Syriac texts of the Peshitta. See A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai: A Hand-List of the Arabic Manuscripts and Scrolls Microfilmed at the Library of the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Baltimore, 1955), 19. Note also pls. II–V, showing the Syriac, Greek, and Kufic palimpsests. See also H. Husmann, “Die syrischen Handschriften des Sinai-Klosters: Herkunft und Schreiber,” *OKS* 24 (1975), 281–308. Most of the MSS listed here were copied by known copyists, named in the colophons, from the 13th century. Presumably they worked from earlier materials. One knows there were Syriac MSS in Mar Sabas monastery in the 8th century from the testimony included in a MS containing a text by Isaac the Syrian, written in the monastery. See F. Nau, “Analyse du manuscrit syriaque de Paris, no. 378 de la Bibliothèque Nationale,” *ROC* 27 (1929–30), 411–15.

⁵² See Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 47–48.

⁵³ See [D. Miller], *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston, 1984), lxxxv–lxxxvi.

⁵⁴ See C. Bacha, *The Mīmārs of Theodorus Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān, the Earliest Christian Arabic Writer* (Beirut, 1904; in Arabic), 60–61.

⁵⁵ See the remarks of Paul Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental de l’hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels, 1950), appendix, “Traductions et traducteurs dans l’hagiographie orientale à l’époque byzantine,” 175–83.

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 24; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 20.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 186.

⁵⁸ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, I, 21; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 16.

Greek. This situation posed a problem for John Binns. In *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, he writes: “The relationship between the monks and the Arabs raises the question of the language used. The monks spoke Greek, and while they also used their native languages of Armenian, Bessian, or some other language, they were not reputed for their linguistic ability. . . . Arab nomads did not speak Greek, according to information provided by Theodoret. . . . This lack of a common language must have complicated the catechetical process.”⁵⁹

But there was no “lack of a common language.” Arabic aside, there was the common idiom of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, the very language that, under the name of “Syriac,” Binns was in such a hurry to banish from the monasteries. The language flourished in Palestine and Jordan, and in the monastic communities, precisely during the period between the fifth and the seventh centuries. What is more, it was, according to the findings of the current authorities, M. Bar-Asher, A. Desreumaux, and C. Müller-Kessler, very much the language that developed locally from the old Aramaic dialect of the rural and nomadic groups of Galilee, Transjordan, and what Bar-Asher calls “a radius of 30 to 40 kilometres around the city [of Jerusalem].”⁶⁰ No doubt there was also a currency of Arabic in this milieu in the fifth and sixth centuries, primarily among those whom Cyril calls “Saracens.”⁶¹ But Arabic in no way infringes on the communicability of CPA; bilingualism had long been a feature of the lives of the nomadic and the settled Arabs in those territories in which both Aramaic and Arabic were current and intermingled. Indeed there is evidence of a considerable influence of Arabic on CPA, especially in the latter period of its currency as a liturgical language.⁶²

As for the Christological controversies that played such a determining role in the schism of the oriental churches in the sixth century, and that would continue to engage the talents of writers in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic for centuries to come, there is no evidence that language was a decisive factor in a given population’s choice of a doctrinal or a hierarchical allegiance. The Chalcedonian faith of the monks of the Judean desert was certainly loudly proclaimed in all three languages and not least in CPA.

John Binns, one will recall, posits a decline of “Syriac” in Palestine as one of the significant factors in the choice of Chalcedonian allegiance in Jerusalem. He then assigns three reasons for the adoption of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the monastic establishment: “the geography of the desert, the internationalism of the community, and the devotion to the Holy Places.” He says that these factors were “unique to Palestine and had a decisive influence on the course of the controversy.”⁶³ While there can be no doubt that these factors were important dimensions of the Palestinian monastic experience, one may hesitate to conclude that they had so much to do with the option for Chalcedon. If one must find a sociohistorical cause for the espousal of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, or a sine qua non condition to explain it, apart from the conviction on the part of Euthymius and his followers that it was the truth, Cyril of Scythopolis’ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* sug-

⁵⁹ Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 114.

⁶⁰ Bar-Asher, “Le syro-palestinien,” 29.

⁶¹ On this subject, see the important work of Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1989); idem, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1994).

⁶² See Müller-Kessler, “Die Überlieferungsstufen,” 60.

⁶³ Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 199.

gests that the requisite condition was the perception on the part of the monks that the faith of Chalcedon was miraculously warranted and that it would have been the choice of the ancient fathers of monasticism. In other words, the determining factor was the widespread acceptance of the authority of the “holy man,” almost in the Peter Brown sense of the term,⁶⁴ and the personal charisma of Euthymius and Sabas. It would have been as Sabas himself reportedly said to Emperor Anastasius about the patriarch of Jerusalem Elias I (494–516) and his loyalty to Chalcedon: “May Your Serenity rest fully assured that the archbishop of our holy city of God, educated in the doctrines of piety by the ancient luminaries and miracle-working fathers of our desert, rejects equally both Nestorius’ division and Eutyches’ confusion and, following the middle road of the orthodox Church, allows deviation, . . . neither to the right nor to the left.”⁶⁵

The operative phrase in this paragraph is “educated in the doctrines of piety by the . . . miracle-working fathers of our desert.” For in Jerusalem, it is thus clear, orthodoxy was determined not so much by the bishop but by the allegiance of the monastic establishment, where the authority was not that of jurisdiction but that of the evidentiary miracle. Bernard Flusin has studied in detail the centrality of the miraculous in Cyril’s *Lives*.⁶⁶ But the purpose of the literary prominence of the miracle in the *Lives* is not just to commend the primacy of the monastic establishment of the Judean desert and of Jerusalem, as virtually the center of the church of the empire, the church of Justinian, as Flusin seems to imply. Rather, Cyril’s ultimate purpose was to commend the Neo-Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the Sabaïte establishment, and of the Jerusalem church, as I argue elsewhere,⁶⁷ particularly in the context of the struggle with the Jacobites, whom Cyril regularly calls *Aposchists*. In the sixth century this was largely a monastic struggle, and the monks on both sides carried the bishops with them rather than vice versa. This is often a forgotten, or at least a not-often-mentioned, aspect of Cyril’s *Lives*.⁶⁸ It is not for nothing that he calls Sabas “the advocate of orthodoxy and accuser of heresy.”⁶⁹ And the dispute was not only over Christology. Origenism, as a monastic heresy in Cyril’s eyes, was also an issue between Palestinian and Syrian monks; Philoxenus of Mabbug, the Jacobite monk whom Cyril names twice in the *Lives*, was a passionate devotee of Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399),⁷⁰ whom Cyril names three times as an adversary. It is a mistake therefore to think that the Syriac-speaking monastic communities in the patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the Coptic-speaking monks of Egypt, were not part of the contemporary scenario within which one must read Cyril’s *Lives*. The very internationalism of the Judean desert monastic establishment is what underlies its bid to be the spokesman for the orthodoxy of the empire. And orthodoxy on the popular level seems

⁶⁴ See the influential article by Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *JRS* 61 (1971), 80–101.

⁶⁵ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, I, 145; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 153–54.

⁶⁶ See B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l’œuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris, 1983).

⁶⁷ See S. H. Griffith, “The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy: Miracles and Monks’ Lives in Sixth-Century Palestine,” forthcoming publication of the seminar on “Miracles” sponsored by the Seminar on Judaism and Early Christianity in the Department of Theology, the University of Notre Dame.

⁶⁸ See C. Stallman-Pacitti, *Cyril of Scythopolis: A Study in Hagiography as Apology* (Brookline, Mass., 1991).

⁶⁹ Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, I, 158; Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, 167.

⁷⁰ See A. Guillaumont, *Les “Képhalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens* (Paris, 1962), esp. 173–200, 205–14, 304–20. See also J. W. Watt, “Philoxenus and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius’ *Centuries*,” *OC* 64 (1980), 65–81.

to have been discerned in the doctrinal allegiance of the holy men who in the sixth century can show themselves the most convincingly to be the heirs of Antony, Pachomius, Basil, and the holy monks celebrated by Palladius (ca. 365–425) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ca. 393–ca. 466). These were the sources and models for both the Chalcedonian Cyril of Scythopolis in his *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* and for the Jacobite John of Ephesus in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*.⁷¹ It is also why in the sixth century there was a massive effort to translate the classics of Egyptian desert spirituality into Syriac, so that the largely Jacobite, and even Nestorian, Syriac-speaking monks could lay claim to the mantle of monastic sanctity.⁷²

As for the currency of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, the evidence suggests, as we have seen, that it flourished as a spoken and written language in Palestine and Transjordan until it gave way to Arabic in the eighth century, as the local idiom of the Melkite Christians. Thereafter it survived as a fading liturgical language in some places until the time of the Crusades. In its written form, CPA is undoubtedly the product of the monasteries, where the biblical, liturgical, and other texts were translated and copied. In all probability, as we have seen, monk-scribes were the ones who adapted the *Estrangelo* bookhand of classical Syriac for writing CPA. Once the convention of writing the language in Syriac script was established, it was, of course, readily available for use in inscriptions as well as in manuscripts.

CPA inscriptions have been studied in the effort to determine the social status of the speakers of the language. On the basis of their distribution, the quality of their execution, and their general ambience, Milka Levy-Rubin has argued that CPA was the language of a relatively poor and disenfranchised population, outside the urban centers in Palestine. On her hypothesis, neither CPA nor the Christian Arabic that largely supplanted it after the eighth century ever seriously displaced Greek as the dominant cultural language of the patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁷³ In my view, while it is clear that Greek enjoyed an enormous prestige in the public places of the ecclesiastical establishment throughout Syria/Palestine in Byzantine and early Islamic times, where Greek inscriptions fulfilled an almost iconic function in churches, in cemeteries, and on dedicatory plaques, it is far from evident that the presence of such inscriptions in a locale indicated that Greek was spoken there.⁷⁴ On the other hand, where Aramaic or Arabic inscriptions appear, because of their relative lack of the social and ecclesiastical prestige of Greek, they may be taken as evidence of the currency of these languages in the locale. But it does not follow that the deployment of these local languages bespeaks poverty and social disenfranchisement. Rather, it suggests a burgeoning accommodation to the cultural facts of the place, especially at a distance from the centers of empirewide pilgrimage in the Holy Land. In the early Islamic period, when Arabic was quickly becoming the lingua franca of a new world order, Greek inscriptions persisted in ecclesiastical premises, and Greek persisted in the

⁷¹On John of Ephesus, see S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and The Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, 1990); *ibidem*, “Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches,” *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 295–308.

⁷²See the discussion of this phenomenon in Griffith, “The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy.”

⁷³See the studies of Milka Levy-Rubin cited in note 39 above.

⁷⁴Consider, for example, the presence of a Greek inscription in the church of Mar Jacob in Nisibis, in the heart of the Syriac-speaking world. See J. Jarry, “Inscriptions syriaques et arabes inédites du Tur ‘Abdin,” *Annales Islamologiques* 10 (1972), 242–43, no. 74. See also G. Bell, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur ‘Abdin*, with introduction and notes by M. Mundell Mango (London, 1982), 143–45.

divine liturgy and in theology, at the same time that Arabic was becoming an ecclesiastical language.⁷⁵ Gradually, from the ninth century onward, while Greek retained its social prestige and iconic functions, one would be hard-pressed to find any evidence of new compositions in this lingua sacra in Syria/Palestine. It is in this sense that one might agree with Cyril Mango's dictum that "in the course of the 9th century the practice of Greek all but died out in Palestine and Syria."⁷⁶ CPA, too, persisted into the Islamic era as a local liturgical language. However, unlike Greek, it was gradually eclipsed altogether by Arabic, which was not the language of a local Christian community but the idiom of the world of Islam, which all the Christian communities in the caliphate gradually adopted for purposes of survival.

III. MELKITE ARABIC

Beginning in the eighth century, and swelling into a flood in the ninth century, Arabic came to challenge even Greek in the monastic communities of the Judean desert as the spoken language of the local Christians, largely the Melkite community of the world of Islam. So much was this the case that Arabic itself may be seen as one of the defining features of the Melkite ecclesiastical identity.⁷⁷ So distinctive was the Arabic employed in this monastic milieu that Joshua Blau, the modern scholar who has the most intensely studied what he once called "old south Palestinian" Arabic as a manifestation of Middle Arabic,⁷⁸ has recently suggested that the Arabic texts that circulated in the monastic communities of Palestine actually furnish enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that there was among the Melkites throughout the caliphate a literary *koinē*, which served as an Arabic lingua franca for the whole Melkite community throughout the oriental patriarchates.⁷⁹ This lingua franca then became the cultural carrier of the distinctive Melkite identity among the Christians living in the world of Islam. It had at its core an allegiance to the orthodoxy of the "six councils" as they had been accepted in the late seventh century in the Judean desert monasteries of Jerusalem,⁸⁰ the doctrines of which were systematized and put forward in summary fashion by the great eighth-century teacher from Mar Sabas monastery, John of Damascus.⁸¹ But it was Theodore Abū Qurrah, the scion of a new generation at Mar Sabas monastery in the late eighth century, who stood as the first notable Melkite writer in Arabic whose name we know, who most

⁷⁵See R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, 1995).

⁷⁶Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," 151.

⁷⁷On this subject, see S. H. Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era: The Making of a Christian Identity in the World of Islam," paper presented at the Fourth Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam (as above, note 39).

⁷⁸See J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, CSCO 267, 276, 279 (Louvain, 1966–67).

⁷⁹See J. Blau, "A Melkite Arabic Literary Lingua Franca from the Second Half of the First Millennium," *BSO[AJS]* 57 (1994), 14–16.

⁸⁰In due course, Melkites included the seventh ecumenical council, Nicaea II in 787, among the councils of orthodoxy, but the practice of affirming the "six councils" lasted until modern times. Among the Melkite collections of canons in Arabic from the 13th to the 17th century, only seven of the twenty-one MSS mention the seventh council. See J. B. Darblade, *La collection canonique arabe des Melkites (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)* (Harissa, 1946), 154–55.

⁸¹See B. Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise des Johannes von Damaskus*, StPB 2 (Ettal, 1956); B. Kotter, *Die Überlieferung der Pege Gnoseos des hl. Johannes von Damaskos*, StPB 5 (Ettal, 1959).

readily reflects the personal profile of the new Sabaïte monastic writer: he clearly put forward the requisite ecclesiastical Hellenism in an Arabic idiom thoroughly conditioned by the Islamic religious milieu in which the Melkites lived.⁸²

Here is not the place to set out in any detail the account of the early production of texts in Arabic on the part of the monks of the monasteries of Palestine. I have addressed this issue at some length in other essays.⁸³ Suffice it for now to call attention to those items that can confidently be dated to the eighth century, the era of the turn to Arabic.

The earliest Christian Palestinian text written in Arabic that carries some internal suggestion of the date of its composition is a now anonymous apologetic tract which its first modern editor entitled “On the Triune Nature of God.”⁸⁴ At one point in the text the author spoke of the stable endurance of Christianity against all odds: “If this religion were not truly from God it would not have stood so unshakably for seven hundred and forty-six years.”⁸⁵ If one computes the beginning of the Christian era from the year of the Incarnation, according to the Alexandrian world era, which Palestinian scribes were likely to use prior to the tenth century, one arrives at a date of 755 for the composition of the treatise.⁸⁶ This year is, of course, only a year or so removed from the probable date of the death of John of Damascus (ca. 754). Otherwise, the earliest recorded date so far published from an early documentary source which refers to a Christian text in Arabic is contained in a note appended to the end of an Arabic version of the story of the “Fathers who were killed at Mount Sinai,” which appears in two manuscripts, Sinai Arabic MS 542 (fol. 15r) and British Library Oriental MS 5019 (fol. 58b). The wording of the note is slightly different in the two manuscripts, but they agree in stating that the text of the martyrdom was originally translated from Greek into Arabic in the Hijra year 155, which corresponds to A.D. 772.⁸⁷ On this evidence, one might be inclined to date the

⁸²See S. H. Griffith, “Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century,” Annual Lecture of the Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature, Tel Aviv University, 1992.

⁸³See Griffith, *Arabic Christianity* (above, note 31).

⁸⁴See M. D. Gibson, ed., *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, from an Eighth or Ninth Century MS. in the Convent of St Catharine on Mount Sinai, with a Treatise, “On the Triune Nature of God,”* Studia Sinaitica 7 (Cambridge, 1899). See also S. Khalil Samir, “The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750),” in S. Khalil Samir and J. S. Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)* (Leiden, 1994), 57–114. See now the Italian translation, with notes and introduction, in M. Gallo, ed. and trans., *Palestinese anonimo, omelia arabo-cristiana dell’VIII secolo*, Collana di Testi Patristici diretta da Antonio Quacquarelli 116 (Rome, 1994).

⁸⁵Sinai Arabic MS 154, fol. 100v. Gibson unaccountably skipped this passage in her edition of the treatise. I am indebted to Fr. Samir Khalil Samir for the reference, which is clearly legible in the Library of Congress microfilm copy of Sinai Arabic MS 154.

⁸⁶Mark N. Swanson proposes a date of 788 for this treatise, arguing that Melkite writers of the period would count the beginning of the Christian era from the year of the crucifixion and not from the year of the incarnation, according to the Alexandrian system. In support of this view he cites several passages from several works in which the writers mention the rent of the temple veil at the time of Jesus’ death (Matt. 27:51) as a sign of the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new one. See M. N. Swanson, “Some Considerations for the Dating of *Fi Tathlīth Allāh al-Wāhid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-Jāmi‘ Wujūh al-Imān* (London, British Library or. 4950),” *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993), 115–41. It seems to this writer that this *theologoumenon*, common enough in early Christian texts, is unlikely to have displaced the equally common practice of counting the Christian years from the first year of the incarnation. See V. Grumel, *La chronologie* (Paris, 1958).

⁸⁷See the details discussed in S. H. Griffith, “The Arabic Account of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ an-Najrānī al-Ghassānī,” *Le Muséon* 98 (1985), 337–42, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*.

beginning of an ecclesiastical career for the Arabic language in the monasteries of Palestine to the third quarter of the eighth century. But this would be to reckon without the hints one can find in other places for an earlier use of Arabic. For example, early in the present century a dual-language fragment of Psalm 78:20–61 in Greek and Arabic was found in the archives of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. The unusual feature of the piece is that the Arabic text appears in Greek script.⁸⁸ On the basis of a paleographical analysis of this script, plus other considerations, Bruno Violet dated it to the end of the eighth century. But now Rachid Haddad has argued that a date just a little after the first decade of the eighth century is probable.⁸⁹ Similarly, there is the case of the intriguing quintuple palimpsest among the Arab Christian manuscripts in the Sinai collection, Sinai Arabic MS 514, which Aziz Suryal Atiya dubbed the “*Codex Arabicus*.” It is all by itself virtually a complete stratigraphic record of the Christian literary history of Palestine to the early Arabic period. The lower two layers, containing Syriac texts of the Peshitta, are succeeded by a Gospel lectionary in Greek uncials of the seventh century, followed by an undetermined text in an archaic Kufic hand of Arabic from the first century of the Hijra, which in turn was washed away to make room for what Atiya calls the “middle Kufic of the eighth to early ninth century.”⁹⁰ Finally, in this same connection one might mention a papyrus text of unknown provenance that contains fragments of two Arab Christian disputations with Muslims from the early period. On the basis of paleographical considerations, Georg Graf dated them to the middle or to the second half of the eighth century.⁹¹

When all is said and done, the available documentary evidence therefore allows one to say that there are grounds for assuming that the Judean desert monks took to translating church books into Arabic and to composing original works in the language of public life in the Muslim caliphate early in the second half of the eighth century, it not being unlikely that the enterprise actually began somewhat earlier in the century. In all probability, New Testament texts such as the Arabic Gospel lectionaries that were copied in Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton in the ninth century have their origins in Arabic translations made earlier in the eighth century. And an interesting feature of these translations, all made from Greek, is that they show considerable evidence of influence from the text of the Gospels preserved in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, which also rests on a Greek *Vorlage*.⁹²

It is clear then that the turn to Arabic in the Palestinian monasteries was contemporaneous with the era, almost a century after the Islamic conquest, in which Cyril Mango and others have seen these same monasteries in the ensemble as “the most active centre of Greek culture”⁹³ in the world of that time, Byzantium included. Furthermore, it seems

⁸⁸See B. Violet, “Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus,” offprint, with corrections, from *Orientalistische Litteratur-Zeitung*, 1901 (Berlin, 1902).

⁸⁹See R. Haddad, “La phonétique de l’arabe chrétien vers 700,” in *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam*, ed. P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 159–64.

⁹⁰See Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai*, 19.

⁹¹See G. Graf, “Christlich-arabische Texte: Zwei Disputationen zwischen Muslīmen und Christen,” in F. Bilabel and A. Grohmann, *Griechische, koptische und arabische Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit* (Heidelberg, 1934), 4.

⁹²See S. H. Griffith, “The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into Its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century,” *OC* 69 (1985), 155–56, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*.

⁹³Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine,” 149–50.

that initially, in the eighth century, Arabic was beginning to occupy that niche in the social fabric of the monasteries and of the church in Palestine that had theretofore been solely the province of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, that is to say, the language of the non-Greek-speaking local population of the patriarchate of Jerusalem. One gets the impression from the *Vita* of Stephen the Sabaite (d. 794), written in Greek by Leontius of Damascus at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, that Greek was no longer spoken in a day-to-day way in the Palestinian monastic community, albeit that the monks wrote in Greek and the liturgy was largely Greek. For in at least two places in the *Vita* Leontius makes a point of saying that Stephen spoke in Greek (Ἐλληνιστὶ) to visitors, as if this was something unexpected and therefore remarkable.⁹⁴ Furthermore, there is evidence that at this same time some monks had considerable difficulty learning the requisite amount of Greek for the liturgical life of the monastery. At the end of an account of the twenty martyrs who were killed by marauding Arabs at Mar Sabas around the year 796/797 the author included a report of some miracles that were worked later by means of their intercession. One of them involves a Syrian man, who, try as he might, could not learn Greek well enough to be proficient in the recitation of the Psalter or in the reading of Holy Scripture. He made himself sick with the effort he expended in trying to learn Greek. Then, in a dream, the Protodeacon Anastasius, one of the martyred monks, who had been his friend, appeared to him and, as the text has it, wiped his tongue clean of a viscous, greenish-yellow substance. When he awoke, the Syrian had miraculously learned Greek and was able to use it with a facility that astounded his confreres.⁹⁵

The period of the demise of CPA as a spoken language, after the eighth century, corresponds to the period of the rise of Arabic in the same milieu. Indeed there is the very real possibility that some monks were trilingual in this period, speaking Greek, Aramaic, and Arabic. But there is an important difference to be noted in the range and the fortunes of CPA and Arabic. The latter was the language of a burgeoning commonwealth,⁹⁶ indeed the carrier of a vibrant new culture, while the former was very much a provincial dialect of the Aramaic family of languages, which under the pressure of Arabic was ultimately to disappear. Moreover, while both Arabic and Aramaic took second place behind Greek in ecclesiastical importance in the Melkite Christian communities of the Islamic world, CPA was never more than the language of Palestine and parts of Transjordan, while the Arabic-speaking monks of the Judean desert monasteries, and particularly those of Mar Sabas monastery, found themselves at the heart of an Arabic-speaking, ecclesiastical network that stretched from the territories of the patriarchate of Antioch southward through the Sinai and into Egypt, with Jerusalem as the constant *point de repère* for all concerned, even as their worldly fortunes were shrinking under the pressure of Islam.⁹⁷

Unlike the case with CPA, in which language no original compositions have yet been found, all of the extant works being translations from Greek, already in the eighth cen-

⁹⁴“Vita s. Stephani Sabaitae Thaumaturgi Monachi,” in *AASS*, Jul. III (Paris-Rome, 1868), 540c, 567e. In fact, the *Vita* of St. Stephen is preserved complete only in Arabic. See B. Pirone, *Leonzio di Damasco: Vita di Santo Stefano Sabaita*, *Studia Orientalia Christiana Monographiae* 4 (Cairo-Jerusalem, 1991).

⁹⁵See A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Συλλογὴ Παλαιστίνης καὶ Συριακῆς Ἀγιολογίας, I, *PPSb* 19.3 (St. Petersburg, 1907), 36. See also “De SS. Viginti Monachis Martyribus,” in *AASS*, Mar. III (Paris-Rome, 1865), 176e–f.

⁹⁶See G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 138–68.

⁹⁷See Griffith, “Melkites in the Umayyad Era.”

tury Arabic-speaking monks were authoring original works in the language of the Qur’ān, as well as translating the Scriptures and other Christian and monastic classics into that language from Greek and Syriac. What is more, from the ninth century until well into the eleventh century, while there is a crescendo in the number of Arabic texts written in the monasteries,⁹⁸ there is little or no evidence from this period of any significant compositions in Greek.⁹⁹ The irony is that in the Arabic-speaking Melkite communities in the oriental patriarchates, for a long time Greek was no more than a patristic and liturgical language, albeit one of great prestige. Its fortunes were not altogether unlike those of CPA in Palestine, with the important difference that in later days the prospects of Greek would revive, but CPA would be lost for good.

In Arabic, as in Greek or Christian Palestinian Aramaic, an important purpose of the monks of the Judean desert monasteries was to keep the special holiness of their institution before the minds of the Melkite community, especially that of the Sabaïte monasteries. There is an interesting passage illustrating this concern in the story of Michael the Sabaïte, a martyr in the time of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705). The story was written originally in Arabic in the ninth century, but it survives only in Georgian and Greek versions. The author had the following to say about Mar Sabas monastery: “Just as Jerusalem is the queen of all cities, so is the laura of Sabas the prince of all deserts, and so far as Jerusalem is the norm of other cities, so too is St. Sabas the exemplar for other monasteries.”¹⁰⁰

A special sign of the importance of the monastic establishment may also be seen in the early translations of Cyril of Scythopolis’ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* into Arabic.¹⁰¹ In fact, it is only in Arabic that the full text of Cyril’s life of the monk Abramius (474–557) has been preserved.¹⁰² It is interesting to observe, in the Arabic version of Cyril’s *Lives*, that the monk-translators have not adhered slavishly to the Greek original, but did make an effort to have the accounts come alive in Arabic,¹⁰³ testifying thereby to the continued relevance of Cyril’s work in the monastic communities as an important record of the signs and wonders of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy to which they continued vigorously to pledge allegiance. Similarly, the monks continued to commend the holiness of the

⁹⁸ See Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine” (above, note 31).

⁹⁹ Pace Levy-Rubin, “Society, Language, and Culture.”

¹⁰⁰ P. Peeters, “La Passion de s. Michel le Sabaïte,” *AB* 48 (1930), par. 14, p. 76. On this text, see also M. J. Blanchard, “The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery,” *ARAM* 6 (1994), 149–63; and S. H. Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period,” *ARAM* 6 (1994), 115–48.

¹⁰¹ See S. H. Griffith, “Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas: Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine,” *ChHist* 58 (1989), 7–19, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*.

¹⁰² See G. Graf, “Athār nāṣrānī qadim; aw tarjamah mār Abramiūs al-qiddis bi l-‘arabiyyah,” *al-Machriq* 8 (1905), 258–65. Graf also published a German translation of the text in G. Graf, “Die arabische Vita des hl. Abramios,” *BZ* 14 (1905), 509–18. What is preserved in Arabic is incorporated into the French version of the life of Abramius in A. J. Festugière, *Les moines d’orient*, vol. III, pt. 3, *Les moines de Palestine* (Paris, 1963), 69–79. In Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis*, the portions of Abramius’ life that are missing from the Greek are translated into English from the Latin version of the Arabic, in P. Peeters, “Historia S. Abramii ex apographo arabico,” *AB* 24 (1905), 349–56.

¹⁰³ See the forthcoming study by Kate Leeming, “Byzantine History in Arabic: Translations of Greek Hagiographies in a Ninth-Century Palestinian Manuscript (Vaticanus Arabicus 71),” paper presented at the Syriac Symposium II, the Catholic University of America, 8–10 June 1995.

monastic establishment in the Judean desert by composing martyrologies, largely in Arabic, that celebrated the fidelity of those of their number who gave their lives in testimony to their faith in response to the new religious challenge of Islam.¹⁰⁴ And in the Melkite community it was also the monks who were the first composers of apologetical tracts in Arabic in the effort to provide Christians with answers to the objections to their faith raised by Muslims.¹⁰⁵

In later times, when there were greater numbers of Greek-speakers in Jerusalem and in the monasteries of the Holy Land than there had been between the ninth century and the coming of the crusaders from the West, Jacques de Vitry (1170–1213), the Latin bishop of Acre, noted in his *History of Jerusalem* that the “Syrians,”¹⁰⁶ as he called the local Arabophone Christians, used Arabic only for their secular business. In religious matters, the bishop alleged, they were totally dependent on the Greeks.

The Syrians use the Saracen language in their common speech, and they use the Saracen script in deeds and business and all other writing, except for the Holy Scriptures and other religious books, in which they use the Greek letters; wherefore in Divine service their laity, who only know the Saracenic tongue, do not understand them. . . . The Syrians exactly follow the rules and customs of the Greeks in Divine service and other spiritual matters, and obey them as their superiors.¹⁰⁷

While it is somewhat disheartening to see that in the twelfth century Jacques de Vitry had no knowledge of the burgeoning Christian Arabic literature that poured from the monasteries of the Judean desert, particularly those of Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton, one notices also that, according to him, in the late twelfth century in Jerusalem, Arabic did not even play that role in the divine liturgy which in an earlier day Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, and Arabic itself had played. Now, according to the Latin bishop of Acre, “in Divine service their laity, who only know the Saracenic tongue, do not understand them,” because the liturgy is entirely in Greek. It is as if the earlier practice of making an allowance in the liturgy for the local languages of the non-Greek-speaking population had been reversed. And, indeed, there is some evidence that in Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries this is exactly what happened; an earlier linguistic pluralism gave way to an insistence on Greek in matters of faith and cult. Gilbert Dagron has recently ascribed this eventuality to the fact that at this time “the Byzantine authors, or licensed ‘heresiologues,’ more and more had the tendency to tie the heretical phenomenon to linguistic and ethnic diversity.”¹⁰⁸ Consequently, he goes on to conclude that an attitude developed in Byzantium, according to which, even “if Christianity was recognized to be multilingual, a hierarchy of languages existed, and orthodoxy was exclusively

¹⁰⁴ See S. H. Griffith, “Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martys: Saints’ Lives in Holy Land History,” forthcoming publication in the proceedings of the conference, “Interactions between Religious Communities in the Holy Land (1st–15th Centuries),” Jerusalem, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2–5 October 1994.

¹⁰⁵ See Griffith, *Arabic Christianity*; idem, “Theodore Abū Qurrah.” See also Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics*.

¹⁰⁶ It is interesting to observe that in the 12th century western writers were still referring to the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land as *Syri*, just as Eusebius and Egeria had done in the 4th century.

¹⁰⁷ Jacques de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem: A.D. 1180*, trans. A. Steward (London, 1896), 68–69.

¹⁰⁸ G. Dagron, “Formes et fonctions du pluralisme linguistique à Byzance (IXe–XIIe siècle),” *TM* 12 (1994), 228.

Greek.”¹⁰⁹ In this connection, Dagron cites the response attributed to Theodore Balsamon (d. after 1195), the patriarch of Antioch resident in Constantinople in the late twelfth century, to the following question: “Is it without danger that orthodox Syrians and Armenians, but also faithful from other countries, say the office in their own language, or are they in any case obliged to officiate with books written in Greek?” Balsamon replied: “Those who are in every point orthodox, if they are totally foreign to the Greek language, can celebrate the liturgy in their own language, using habitual responses to the holy prayers, without modification and transcribed from *kontakia* beautifully written in Greek letters.”¹¹⁰ This must have been the attitude that came to prevail in Jerusalem in the years when the Greek-speakers returned even to the Judean desert monastic communities in the wake of the crusaders from the West. Greek enjoyed a renaissance in the Holy Land, and the liturgy of Constantinople eclipsed the old liturgy of Jerusalem. But Arabic remained the language of public discourse in the Melkite community, and the Gospel was proclaimed in the idiom of the Qur’ān, still in large part due to the efforts of the monks of the Holy Land monasteries.

IV. APPENDIX: ARMENIAN AND GEORGIAN

Two language communities of particular importance in the Holy Land during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods were the Armenians and the Georgians. Both of them also made their mark in the Judean desert monastic communities, although their languages were not central to the monastic experience there, as was Greek, nor were they local languages, as were Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic. Nevertheless, documents composed in both of these languages, and emanating from Palestine, have been of considerable historical significance.

The Armenian presence in the Holy Land throughout the Byzantine period and well into Islamic times has been largely by way of continuous pilgrimage. Numerous inscriptions left behind by the pilgrims are the testimonies to this traffic. And they suggest that the number of pilgrims increased considerably in the seventh century, once Islamic power removed any resistance the Chalcedonian government of Byzantium might have offered to the largely Jacobite Armenians bent on pilgrimage to the holy places.¹¹¹ But there were Armenian monks in the Judean monasteries as well, as is clear from the special provision made for them in the matter of the use of their language in the liturgy in the monastery of Mar Sabas.¹¹² What is more, there is also evidence that from the seventh century onward there was an enclave of Chalcedonian Armenians in the Jerusalem patriarchate engaged in theological activity and producing texts that had a considerable influence on ecclesiastical and political developments back in Armenia.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Dagron, “Formes et fonctions,” 230.

¹¹⁰G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles, eds., *Syntagma ton theion kai hieron kanonon*, 6 vols. (Athens, 1852–59), IV, 452–53; quoted in Dagron, “Formes et fonctions,” 230.

¹¹¹See the introductory remarks of Michael E. Stone, *The Armenian Inscriptions from the Sinai* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 30–36, 49–52.

¹¹²See the texts cited in notes 12–14 above. See also C. Renoux, “L’Épiphanie à Jérusalem au IVe et au Ve siècle d’après le lectionnaire arménien de Jérusalem,” *REArm*, n.s., 2 (1965), 343–59; idem, *Le lectionnaire de Jérusalem en Arménie: Le čašoc: I. Introduction et liste des manuscrits*, PO 44.4 = 200 (Turnhout, 1989).

¹¹³See S. P. Cowe, “An Armenian Job Fragment from Sinai and Its Implications,” *OC* 76 (1972), 123–57.

In the ninth century there was apparently a concerted effort made by Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807–821) and his associate Theodore Abū Qurrah to engage Armenians in theological debate in both Jerusalem and Armenia proper.¹¹⁴ So it is clear that the Armenian presence in the monastic communities was an important one, which only grew in significance after the Islamic conquest.

Georgians were in the Holy Land from the middle of the fifth century onward, as both pilgrim testimonies make clear and the records of the monastic establishments certify.¹¹⁵ As Chalcedonians, they were intimately involved with the management of the see of Jerusalem. But from the modern scholarly point of view, one of the most important contributions of Georgian monks in the Judean desert monasteries, particularly in the early Islamic period, was their activity as translators. Numerous texts, originally written in Greek and Arabic, have survived into modern times only because they have been preserved in Georgian translations. The monastery of Mar Sabas was itself the site of an important enclave of Georgian monks, who, together with their colleagues in other Palestinian monasteries, were literarily active especially in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries.¹¹⁶ In particular, one might cite their production of hagiographical and liturgical texts.¹¹⁷ But one of the most important Georgian texts to come out of this milieu and to survive into modern times is the so-called Palestinian-Georgian *Calendar*.¹¹⁸ It was composed by a monk named John Zosimus at the monastery of Mar Sabas at some point in the third quarter of the tenth century. John Zosimus is otherwise known to have worked as a copyist at the monastery at Mount Sinai during the last quarter of the century.¹¹⁹ The *Calendar* is unique in that it offers the modern researcher a firsthand look, as it were, at the liturgical practices of Jerusalem in the period before the reassertion of Byzantine influence in the area, and it reflects the interests principally of the Judean desert monasteries during a period that is otherwise little known.

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¹¹⁴See Griffith, “Theodore Abū Qurrah.”

¹¹⁵See G. Peradze, “An Account of the Georgian Monks and Monasteries in Palestine,” *Georgica* 4–5 (1937), 181–237.

¹¹⁶See Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental*, 202–13.

¹¹⁷See the numerous studies of Gérard Garitte, collected under the title *Scripta Disiecta, 1941–1977*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980). See also M. Tarchnischvili, *Le grand lectionnaire de l’Église de Jérusalem (Ve–VIIIe siècle)*, 4 vols., CSCO 188–89, 204–5 (Louvain, 1959–60); and P. Jeffery, “The Sunday Office of Seventh-Century Jerusalem in the Georgian Chant Book (*Iadgari*): A Preliminary Report,” *Studia Liturgica* 21 (1991), 52–75.

¹¹⁸See G. Garitte, *Le Calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)* (Brussels, 1958).

¹¹⁹See Garitte, *Le Calendrier*, 19.